

are going to be. In the last several days, couple of weeks, the headlines have been dominated by two pieces of sobering news—notwithstanding the Dow going to 11,000 and having 18¼ million jobs and all of that. One, of course, was the tragic killings in Littleton; the other is the ongoing conflict in Kosovo.

I would like to just say a couple of words about that, kind of picking up on what Ron said. I talked with Hillary for a long, long time about what happened in Littleton. And we had a family conversation about it, too. And we talked with Al and Tipper Gore about it, because they've worked on a lot of these cultural and family issues for years.

And then I talked with people all around America. I have to tell you, I do not believe that there is a single thing for us to do; I think there are a lot of big things for us all to do. When we had our meeting Monday to say that we're going to have a national campaign against violence against children, Pam Eakes was there, and I want to thank her for the wonderful work she's done with Mothers Against Violence.

I think that you have to understand that we live in a world where there are a lot of people who are alone even when they're in a crowd, where there are a lot of children who never knew they were the most important person to anyone. And when you have large numbers of vulnerable people, then things that other people can't imagine would be problems can be big problems. So if it's easier for a kid in America to get an assault weapon, whereas it's impossible in most other countries, and you have a higher percentage of vulnerable, disconnected kids, more bad things will happen. If it is easier for a child in America to play an interactive video game where you score by how many innocent people you kill, and you have more vulnerable kids, then it's more likely to have a bad impact.

If we have 300 studies now which show that hours and hours and hours a week after years and years and years of watching sustained, indiscriminate violence makes young people less sensitive to violence and to its consequences, if there are a larger number of disconnected kids, then it will have a more destructive impact than in other countries.

So all of us—not pointing the finger at anybody—we've got something to do to rebuild this web of support to build that village that Hillary always talks about it takes to raise a child. There are things for families to do, things for schools to do, things for communities to do, things for the gun industry to do, things for the entertainment industry to do, things for Congress to do.

I hope Congress finally, next week, will get around to passing that bill that closes the loophole on background checks for gun sales at gun shows. They did pass yesterday, in the Senate bills, to raise the age of handgun ownership to 21 and to close the loophole in the assault weapons ban, which has allowed the sale of large ammunition clips if they're imported since 1994. They voted for that, and I applaud them.

But we need to pass all these common-sense measures. We've moved a long way since we had Democrats from Washington State losing elections in 1994 because they voted for the crime bill, with the assault weapons ban, and the Brady bill. We've come a long way. The voters in Florida—not exactly a raving liberal State—voted 72 percent to close the gun show loophole on the ballot. So we're moving in the right direction.

But I don't want to see our attempts to save our children turn into chapter 57 of America's ongoing culture war for someone's political advantage. What I want to see is to see every single segment of our society stand up and say not, "It's someone else's fault," but, "What can I do?" And let's work through it.

How we deal with this issue—you know, we had all those school killings last year. We did a lot of things. We sent out these wonderful handbooks to every school in the country, and they're very, very good. And people were horrified by it, but somehow, when Littleton happened, I think it finally, like, broke a dam in the psyche of America. I think finally people said, "My goodness, this really can happen anywhere."

And we cannot—we owe it to those families and those children who perished not to let this opportunity pass from us. And not to let it disintegrate into finger pointing. Everybody needs to just stand up and say, "Okay, what can I do?"

But we have to be honest about how every one of these things—look, I can make a case that no single thing—whatever you say the problem is—I’ve heard all these arguments. I can stand up and debate you and say, “No, that’s not the problem; something else is the problem.” And I’ve heard it all. And you know, I could take either side in the guns-versus-culture argument.

But the truth is, start with the facts. There are disconnected children in America, some of them in crowds every day. There are a higher percentage of them in our country—for whatever reason—getting killed every year than in other countries, in spite of all of our prosperity and all of our intelligence and all of our technology and all of our everything else. It’s a fact. It’s a human fact.

And all the things that happen to a person in life, and all the opportunities that are present or absent, they all have an impact. And we need to unpack it and quit saying it’s not our problem, and just have everybody show up and say, “Well, what can I do?”

If there was a fire down the street today and we heard the fire bell ring, every one of us would walk outside; we’d walk up to the firemen and say, “What can I do?” That’s the way we ought to look at this. It ought to be an occasion for bringing this country together.

We were talking at lunch, here. I was down in Texas a few days ago with the daughter of James Byrd, the man who was dragged and dismembered to death in Texas, trying to help pass the hate crimes legislation there. And I hope we can pass it in Washington, and the “Employment Non-Discrimination Act.” Why? Because it will make a big statement about what kind of people we are and what our level of mutual respect for people who are different from us is.

And you ask me, “Well, what has that got to do with Kosovo?” Let’s just move into that.

It is the supreme irony of this new millennium—I mean, here we are. We’ve got all these folks here from Microsoft and Boeing, first one place and the other, and everybody’s got all these great—you know, all of you are more technologically literate than me, doubtless.

But isn’t it ironic that you can stimulate virtually every problem in the world with a

software package. You can do things and communicate with people in ways that already are unimaginable. And within 5 years, there’ll be things that we’re not even thinking about now. And these will be accompanied by breathtaking advances in the biological sciences, as the mysteries of the human genome are unlocked and then the interaction of computer technology and the genome project will be completely explosive in ways that I can’t even imagine.

Isn’t it ironic that in this world we’re going to live in, where we’d like to think, “Gosh, you know, we’ll finally run the average life expectancy up to 120 years, and we’ll all be flying around on safe, fast planes, and we’ll be able to get into cars that won’t have traffic jams because we’ll be able to program them all, and they will all run right. And what a fabulous world it will be. And we’re now building an economy that actually requires less energy, not more—if we do it right—so we’re not going to have to burn the planet up after all.”

We have all these grand dreams for our children’s future, and it is threatened by the oldest problem of human society, which is that we have a hard time getting along with people who are different from us—because we’re afraid of them, and once we get our crowd together, it’s easy for somebody to stir us up and turn our fear into hatred. And once we start hating somebody, then it’s easy for somebody else to come along and turn our hatred into violence.

And there’s a little of that in the reported accounts of Littleton. There was certainly that in the death of James Byrd, or in the death of Matthew Shepard. And it is the thing that most bedevils the world in global politics today.

What is consuming the world today? Fights over technology? Not on your life. What happened in Rwanda? Why is the Northern Ireland conflict unresolved? What are they fighting about in the politics of the Middle East today? What are the Balkans about? Who gets the right to sell Apple computers? Whether somebody represents Microsoft in Belgrade? That’s not what they’re fighting about, is it?

They’re fighting about religion and ethnicity and imagined history and old slights—

real and imagined. That's what the whole thing's about.

And I ask you to think about that. Look at Seattle. Next time—just walk down the street, here. That's what you want America to look like, isn't it? Look around this room here. That's what you want America to look like, and that's what you'd like the world of your children to be like.

Now, I don't ask all these ethnic groups, many of whom are still very poor and early on experiencing their democracies—anywhere—to like each other. Don't even ask them not to fight. But I do not think it is too much to ask, as we have first in Bosnia and now in Kosovo, that there be no ethnic cleansing and slaughter. Or to recognize that if that becomes an acceptable basis of behavior in the world, especially in Europe right at the doorstep of our closet allies and trading partners, that it bodes very ill for the future. We made a terrible mistake with the bombing of the Chinese Embassy, and I regret it more than I can say. I talked to the President of China today and told him that. But you can see that on CNN.

What you do not see on television is the tales told by the refugees of the little village where 15 men had a rope wrapped around them and were burned alive because they happened to be Albanian Muslims, of all the young girls that were systematically raped because they happened to be Kosovar Albanian Muslims and because the people who were oppressing them knew that even though that is horrible in any culture, it is especially awful in theirs.

So I say to you: The reason I talk about all this stuff all the time and the reason we have joined with our NATO Allies and we're doing what we're doing in Kosovo is, I don't want to let the promise of the 21st century be overcome by the oldest poison in human society's history. And America is about to get it right.

The framers of the Constitution knew when they said all of us were created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, they were smart people. They were not dummies. They knew we were nowhere near living that.

You go to the Jefferson Memorial and you see one of Thomas Jefferson's great quotes: "When I think of slavery, I tremble to consider that God is just." They knew that. Well, we're about to get it right. And that's why we have to fight to give all our children a safe future. That's why we have to fight against the last vestiges of discrimination, and that's why we are right to stand with our NATO Allies against ethnic cleansing and manslaughter in Kosovo. It is the world we want our children to live in.

I want to close with this story. A couple of days ago, I had 19 Indian tribal leaders in the White House representing the Dakotas and Montana, the Northern High Plains tribes. They are the poorest tribes in America. And you can imagine that their geographical position doesn't make them very well positioned to get a lot of new and modern investment. You want to put a data center there, they'd be glad to have it.

So anyway—and I got a lot of my Cabinet there and they asked if we could sit in a circle in the Roosevelt Room, as was their custom. And so we did. And the tribal leaders, each in their turn, got up and talked and they talked about housing and education and economics and all of that. And then at the end of the meeting, their spokesperson, a very tall man whose name was Tex, believe it or not, the chief of his particular tribe, he pulls out this scroll and it is a proclamation where the tribal leaders are signing an endorsement of the United States' position in Kosovo. And he said to me, "We know something about ethnic cleansing. And America has come a very long way. And we think we should stand with you."

And then another young tribal leader asked if he could speak. And he stood up; he had a beautiful Indian silver necklace on. And with great dignity he said, "Mr. President, I had two uncles. One of them was on the beach at Normandy; the other was the first Native American fighter pilot in the United States military. My great-great grandfather was slaughtered by the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee. I now am the father of a young son. We have come a long way from my great-great grandfather to my uncles to my son. I love my son more than anything. But because of the distance we have come,

I would gladly have him serve to save the people of Kosovo from having their culture and their lives destroyed."

And there was not—you couldn't breathe in this room because we knew that this dignified man representing people with all kinds of problems was the living embodiment of everything that this country ought to be. And his people were here first. All the rest of us are latecomers.

So I say to you: The best politics for our party is to do what is right for our children and our country for the new century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the Kirtland Cutter Room at the Rainier Club. In his remarks, he referred to event chair Jack Spitzer; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Wayne C. Marshall, regional finance director, Democratic National Committee; Gov. Gary Locke of Washington; Mayor Paul Schell of Seattle; Paul Berendt, chair, Washington State Democratic Party; former Mayor Norman B. Rice of Seattle and his wife, Constance; King County Executive Ron Sims; event cochairs Ted Johnson and Ben Waldman; Pamela Eakes, founder and president, Mothers Against Violence in America; Renee Mullins, daughter of murder victim James Byrd, Jr.; President Jiang Zemin of China; Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (the Three Affiliated Tribes); and Gregg Bourland, chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Portola Valley, California

May 14, 1999

Walter, I'd like to say something that I think a lot of us who've known you for many years could have been thinking. We laughed about how you've always been for losers and now you've had a few winners. But one of the reasons that we love you and admire you is that you stuck by the people with whom you agreed, whether they won or lost. A lot of people don't do that anymore; we appreciate that.

Let me say I'm delighted to be here with Governor Davis and with Sharon, Attorney General Lockyer, Mayor Brown—he's funny,

isn't he? *[Laughter]* I would have come all the way out here tonight just to hear Willie do that little schtick he did, you know? *[Laughter]* When I start to get bored with politics and kind of tired I—and you know, it's 12:30 on my body clock, so I needed a little jolt. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Walter and Martin and Tom, Victoria, all the rest of you who put this dinner together tonight. I want to thank our Democratic Party officers for coming with me: Joe Andrew, Andy Tobias, and Beth Dozoretz.

You know, today we were in Seattle before we came here. And we had all these exciting young people at this fundraiser we did. And a lot of them were kind of high-tech folks. And Joe Andrew got up and said, "In 2000 we're going to win every election, from President to dogcatcher." As if that were a great distance. *[Laughter]* I was sort of hoping we would have a wider range than that myself. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Willie Mays for being here again. I want to thank Walter—one of the greatest things Walter ever did for me was arrange for me to meet Willie Mays. And a lot of you know I am a big sports fan, and I collect memorabilia. I've got 100-year-old golf clubs and all kinds of things, but the things that I treasure the most are the baseballs that Willie has autographed for me and my wife and my daughter.

And I hope he won't be embarrassed by this, but I went to Atlanta the other day—oh, a couple months ago—to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the night Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's record. And Hank and Billie are friends of Hillary's and mine, and we like them very much. So I went down there, and Hank Aaron had 12 Hall of Fame baseball players there—Reggie Jackson and Frank Robinson, just a slew of great players.

And we were sitting there, and I meet all of Hank's family, and his in-laws, and all these—there were thousands of people there. And I just, sort of off the top of my head, I said, "Hank, who's the greatest baseball player you ever played with?" He said, "Oh, that's an easy answer; it's not even close: Willie Mays." He said, "Not even close!"

And I personally would like to thank Willie and his wonderful wife for the work they

have done since leaving baseball and for their concern for our children. And I'm delighted to see them.

I just talked to Hillary not long before I came here. She's on an airplane coming back—you may have seen on the news today, she was in Macedonia visiting the refugees there. And I wanted to mention her, in particular, since we're all making jokes at Gray's expense—including himself making jokes at his expense. The very first person who ever told me he would be elected Governor when he had been written off by all of the experts was my wife, who came to California. And she said, "Man, I've been out there and," she said, "I think he's going to win. He knows why he wants the job; he's done a good job, and he inspires confidence." She said, "He inspires confidence in me, and I believe he would inspire confidence in other people." And sure enough, you have, and we're grateful to you, and we thank you.

I would also like to thank Laura Tyson, who was the Chairman of my Council of Economic Advisers and head of my Economic Council, for being here. And she's now an academic, which means that sooner or later, she will have to criticize something I'm doing on the economy. *[Laughter]* So I'll give her advance dispensation.

Ladies and gentlemen, the hour's late and most of you have heard me give this speech before. *[Laughter]* I'll tell you a story, one more story. One night in the mid-1980s—I can't remember exactly when it was—Tina Turner came to Little Rock, Arkansas, to do a concert. And you all remember, you know, she sort of faded from the scene and then she made this huge recovery with an album called "Private Dancer." I remember because she had a saxophone player in her band who was a weight lifter. Remember that guy, the guy with the great big arms? He had arms as big as my neck, and he wore chains and stuff—it was a weird deal. *[Laughter]* But the guy could play.

So she comes to make this concert and she was playing at the Arkansas Fairgrounds and, I forget, Hillary had to go some place that night. So I had six tickets, and I took all these friends of ours and we went. And usually the guy who ran the concert put me sort of 15 rows back in the middle so I had

a real good seat, but I wasn't conspicuous—because I was the Governor, after all. But he knew I loved Tina Turner.

So this night he completely embarrassed me by putting all six of us on the front row in the middle. And behind us there was a lady I later found out was a hairdresser in a small town about 50 miles away, dressed in a tiger outfit—*[laughter]*—complete with ears and tail and everything. It was an interesting night, all right. *[Laughter]*

But anyway, here's the point I made about the speech—you all laughed when I said you'd all heard the speech. Tina Turner sang all of her new songs, and everybody loved them. Then at the end of the concert the band started playing the introduction to her first hit, "Proud Mary." And as she walked up to the microphone, with all that energy packed into her, the crowd just went crazy before she ever said anything. So she backed off, and then she walked up again. The crowd went crazy again.

And she looked at the crowd and she said, "You know, I have been singing this song for 25 years, and it gets better every time I do it." So I thought, that's something I'll try to remember as I rock along through life. *[Laughter]*

I want to make a case tonight that I hope you can remember. We were talking at our table and I was looking at all of you and I remembered little conversations we shared when you came by and we took the pictures. I always am interested as to what motivates people to get involved in politics, to make their contributions, to come to events like this.

And when you go home tonight, I want you to think about why you came and what you're going to do tomorrow and in the days ahead. I am gratified by what has already been said, what the Governor said, what Walter said. I've loved being President. I love working with people like Mayor Brown, because we think we're supposed to actually enjoy what we're doing. And Gray is actually beginning to enjoy what he's doing. *[Laughter]* I hope it doesn't destroy his whole, sort of, persona, you know. *[Laughter]* But it is a great privilege to be in public service. You know, everybody talks about what a great

burden it is. Well, nobody made us do this. It is a great privilege. It's an honor.

And I am so gratified that the economy is in the shape it's in. I saw the pain in the faces of the people in California when I was running for President in 1992. And I wanted people here to believe that California was the cutting edge of tomorrow again. I wanted them to be full of optimism and hope, and taking all these initiatives, to meet the challenges of our country.

And I'm grateful for the progress we've made in crime and welfare and education and so many other things. I'm glad that 90 percent of our kids are immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time ever. I'm glad that we've got 100,000 young people in AmeriCorps. Many of them have served in northern California. It took the Peace Corps 20 years to get 100,000 volunteers. We got that many in the domestic national service program in 4½ years. I'm proud of that. And I'm grateful for the chance to serve.

But I want to make this point: Whatever role I had in this was not as important as the fact that in 1992, our party united behind a vision and a set of ideas that we have then all worked like crazy for 6 years to make real in the life of America.

And the reason you should be here tonight—because I'm not running for anything—the reason you should be here is not because you're glad I was President and you feel good about what's happened in California, but because you understand that—that there is no indispensable person, but there are indispensable ideas and indispensable attitudes.

I ran for President, and I was happy as a clam at home with Hillary and Chelsea and the life we had. But I was very concerned that our country had no driving vision of what we were going to be like in the 21st century and no strategy to get us there. And I didn't like what I saw in Washington. Everybody was having the same old political debate over and over, sounded like a broken record every day. And if I was bored with it, I can only imagine how people who aren't addicted to politics, like I am, felt.

And we tried to change all that. I really do want our children to live in a world in

the next century where everybody has a chance to live out their dreams, where everybody is expected to be a responsible citizen, where we join together across all the lines that divide us—celebrating the differences but appreciating even more our common humanity, and where America is trusted enough and strong enough to continue to lead the world to greater peace and freedom and prosperity. That's what I want. It's pretty simple.

And I believed in 1992, and I believe more strongly today, that to have that kind of world, we had to have a different approach to politics. First, we had to believe we could grow the economy and preserve the environment at the same time. Second, we had to believe we could grow the economy in a way that had more entrepreneurs like you have in this part of our world, and at the same time make life better for ordinary middle class people and give more poor people a chance to work their way into the middle class.

I believed there was a way you could lower the crime rate not just by prosecuting crime but by preventing it. I believed that we ought to put more money in education, but we had to raise standards, and I was tired of seeing poor people patronized, because I believe all of our children can learn. And lots of other things like that.

I think a lot of times, the debates we have in Washington, they don't resonate very well with the real-world experience people have in California or Arkansas or anywhere else in the country. And the story of this administration has been the story of a relentless effort for over 6 years now to take these basic ideas and that vision and turn them into real, concrete actions and results for the American people.

Now, we still have a lot to do. I'm doing my best to get the Congress to address the challenges of the aging of America, to reform Social Security and Medicare and help people with long-term care, and help people save for their own retirement. I'm asking the Congress to do it in a way that pays down the Government's debt. Did you ever think a politician could even talk about that? Because I believe that we can get the Government debt down in 15 years to its lowest point

since before World War I; and if we do, interest rates will be lower, investment will be higher, there will be more businesses, more jobs and higher incomes. And we will be relatively less dependent on the vagaries of the world financial markets.

I believe that we have to do more to help people balance their work life and their family life. So when I talk about child care or family leave or the Patients' Bill of Rights, what I'm really saying is, most parents are working, and I think it's important for people to succeed at home and at work because the most important work in America is raising good children. And if it doesn't work out, as we often see, there is a grievous price to be paid.

I am concerned in the aftermath of what happened at Littleton, but I am also hopeful because we had all these school shootings last year and people wanted to do things, and a lot of things were done. But I think for the first time, the whole country now believes that what happened with those children could happen in any community. And I believe the whole country wants to do better and also recognizes that many of our children fall victim every year, not in stunning, tragic, big ways but in quiet alleys or in drive-by shootings or in other ways where they can almost die anonymously. And I want us to have a national campaign to make our children's lives less violent.

And I'd like to close with just a reflection on that and what we're doing in Kosovo and point out what I think is—in addition to economic opportunity for all and educational opportunity for all and the sense of general community—I think the most important thing about the Democratic Party on the eve of the 21st century is our vision of what community means at home, and our relationship to the rest of the world. And if you take these two difficult events and break them down, maybe I can make some sense of that.

What I honestly believe about the Littleton situation—and I've spent a lot of time thinking about it. I have been overwhelmingly impressed by almost all of the people I've seen from that community talking on television and going to the town hall meetings. Some of the brave parents, actually already—who lost their children—already able to try

to make some contribution to a safer future for the rest of us. One father who lost his child was with Hillary last week, the day before Mother's Day, to be part of this whole antiviolence movement.

But what I think is that we now understand—I hope we do, as a people—that if we're going to make America a safer place for our children, we have to stop pointing the fingers at one another and start assuming responsibility. We have to—instead of saying, "I wish someone else would do something," we have to say, "Okay, I've shown up for duty. What am I supposed to do?"

Because this is an exceedingly complex thing—Willie and I could have an argument. I could take—you know, we have the—is it the entertainment culture or is it the gun culture? And he could take one side and I could take the other, and then 5 minutes later we could switch roles. We all know how to point fingers—we're good at that—and shift the blame.

Let's start with the facts of life today. For whatever reason, there are more children in the United States, of all races and in all socioeconomic groups, that are at risk of being victims of violence. You would all accept that, I presume; that is a fact, for whatever reason. And there are also children, therefore, at risk of being victims of violence from other young people. Therefore, there are a higher percentage of children in the United States than in most other advanced countries who are themselves vulnerable to violent conduct.

Now, if we start with that, and we say, "Shouldn't we all be doing something," I think we can move to "yes" very quickly. One of the things that you see in all these tragic stories, it's heartbreaking, is how easy it is for children as they come of age and naturally seek their own independence to be strangers in their own homes and not to have people in their schools or their communities that are so connected to them that they can't drift off into the darkness.

So the fundamental thing is, we have to still do a better job trying to help parents understand what it means for children to move into adolescence and to drift away, and to be given both independence and still be held accountable and be involved with their parents and their lives. And we have to help